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Animal Studies

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In this year's overview of animal studies scholarship, I examine how authors strike a difficult balancing act between making critical interventions while preserving complexity, in relation to three (overlapping) topics that have long been central to the field: domestication, consumption, and extinction. The essay begins by engaging with three texts that interrogate the dynamics of domestication, especially in relation to animal rescue: Chris Pearson's *Dogopolis*, Harlan Weaver's *Bad Dog*, and Elan Abrell's *Saving Animals*. Next, I move onto work that offers provocations about the politics of consumption: Catherine Oliver's *Veganism, Archives*, *and Animals,* Emelia Quinn's *Reading Veganism*, and Sushmita Chatterjee and Banu Subramaniam's edited collection *Meat!*. The essay closes by turning to research that discusses the fraught politics of extinction and environmental catastrophe: Nayanika Mathur's *Crooked Cats* and Danielle Celermajer's *Summertime*. While the content of each text explores ethical concerns in relation to nonhuman animals, as I describe below, these books also offer a range of ethical provocations about the trajectory of animal studies itself, which pertain to its norms, values, and methodologies. One thing that unites many of these texts, however, is that they illustrate how staunch critique of existing relations between humans and other beings, does not have to come at the expense of situatedness, conceptual nuance, and recognition of complexity.

A range of narratives exist about the evolution of animal studies. A particularly prominent genealogy can be found in early criticism from the sub-field of critical animal studies (CAS), which traced – and condemned – the wider field's departure from animal liberation and its embrace of poststructuralism (Best, 2009; see also Steiner, 2013). While tensions still exist, the snapshot of animal studies scholarship offered by this essay complicates any assumption that critical approaches are necessarily pitched against

situatedness and theoretical complexity. What the interventions made by many of the texts I discuss here illustrate, is that – with animal studies' maturation – the relationship between critique and complexity is not a zero-sum choice.

Domestication

Animal studies scholarship about domestication has run the gamut from celebrating processes of convivial co-becoming – as, perhaps most famously, with Donna Haraway's (2003) concept of companion species – to research that has traced the wider social tensions that surround these relationships (Holmberg, 2015) or illustrated the violence that saturates attempts to make 'wild' animals encounterable as pets (Collard, 2020). The texts I discuss in this section – *Dogopolis*, *Bad Dog*, and *Saving Animals* – make three interrelated contributions to scholarship about domestication. Firstly, these books offer further historical and social contextualization of how interspecies relations in homes, cities and sanctuaries have evolved. Secondly, through elaborating upon the context of domestication, the authors deepen the field's interrogation of the ethical ramifications of these relationships for the human and nonhuman animals enrolled in them. Finally, each text builds on conceptual trajectories of research within animal studies that have sought to situate human-animal relations within a wider nexus of intersecting inequalities related to class, race, gender and (settler-)colonialism. Reading these texts alongside one another, however, also underlines the importance of method in relation to what sorts of ethical insights and knowledge are generated by animal studies research, and the conclusions that can be drawn from these findings.

Pearson's historical monograph *Dogopolis* is perhaps the most wide-ranging of the three texts, owing to its geographical scope as a comparative project that traces the evolution of canine domestication in three nineteenth-century cities: London, New York and Paris. What is valuable about Pearson's approach is how it elucidates strikingly similar processes at work as dogs become woven into the fabric of urban environments in very different social and cultural settings. These similarities enable Pearson to develop a

persuasive thesis about the relationship between domestication and middle-class values, a thesis that denaturalizes human-dog relationships by illustrating: 'that what many Europeans and North Americans consider to be the universal and natural relationship between dogs and humans is deeply rooted in the distinct emotional histories of urbanization in the West' (p. 2). As suggested by this quotation, Pearson's work is firmly rooted in the history of emotions as well as the recognition central to contemporary affect theory that 'emotions *do* things' (Ahmed, cited in Pearson, p. 27). What emotions do in the context of *Dogopolis*, is inculcate middle-class values into the norms and expectations surrounding human-canine relationships, a process that also fostered the (often violent) exclusion of anything that did not adhere to these norms.

By constructing the book's comparative urban analysis around archival materials Pearson also captures the nuanced differences between how precisely human-dog relations emerged and were codified (into both legislature and social codes of conduct) in modernity. The situated approach that informs *Dogopolis* is not just stated but elucidated through the book's structure, which is oriented around five key themes of human-dog relations – straying, biting, suffering, thinking and defecating – with this approach proving useful in identifying points of overlap and important differences as to how specific issues were engaged with in different contexts.

The fifth chapter, for example, traces how dog waste became categorized as waste in the first place; from the economies of night soil disposal in which canine excrement assumed a particularly lucrative role, to emerging anxieties surrounding miasma and growing awareness of parasites that resulted in fouling being transformed into a public health problem. These shifts were inevitably entangled with concern over who, exactly, was responsible for the problem of dog waste, wherein both similarities and subtle differences began to emerge in different national contexts. Upending commonplace Victorian narratives that tended to place blame for public health issues on the poor, in the case of dog waste 'critics blamed wealthy dog owners for endangering the health of others. They pointed out that many defecating dogs were accompanied by servants' (p. 169). Though similar accusations arose in all three cities, the way this problem was dealt

with varied significantly between contexts. In Paris there was a general reluctance to legislate against dog waste – despite significant public outcry – while New York introduced new laws supported by public health campaigns. London, in contrast, launched bylaws wherein owners would be prosecuted for allowing dogs to foul pavements: but only if pets were on a lead. This approach inevitably saw people removing leads as soon as dogs were about to defecate, which generated further outcry and eventual legal change.

Pearson's chapter on suffering perhaps speaks most clearly to the other books in this section. The nineteenth-century concern with animal welfare in England – which spread to other national contexts – coupled with the effective criminalization of stray dogs, saw the emergence of many phenomena that are associated with animal welfare today: notably the rise of animal rescues, adoption and heated debates over euthanasia. The violent ways dogs were killed in the pound varied across contexts (hanging in Paris, drowning in New York, poisoning in London). However, a more unified, transnational, critique of canine suffering also emerged, and informed the development of more 'humane' slaughter techniques. The rise of 'humane' slaughter gave rise to still further affinities across nations; in each city, class and race shaped which dogs were 'rescued' (pedigrees, certain breeds that spoke to national characteristics) and who was doomed to the pound. These dynamics resulted in a situation where many of the most prominent animal welfare organizations (such as the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Towards Animals [ASPCA]) oversaw vast slaughter programmes of animals who 'did not fit the dogopolis mold' (p. 105) while presenting themselves as neutral defenders of public health. Conversely, the women who often spearheaded animal welfare campaigns, and were often critical of its evolution, were stigmatized as overly sentimental: particularly in the case of those who pioneered no-kill sanctuaries (such as Bide-a-Wee home, which was founded in 1903 in New York) (p. 108).

If I have any criticisms of Pearson's text, it would be for more detail on why these three cities have been selected and how they speak to, or are representative of, broader debates about the relationship between urbanization and human-dog relations in modernity. In addition, the findings presented by *Dogopolis* – and the framing of these findings in relation to histories of emotion – have the potential to

speak back to and productively complicate multispecies scholarship that has presented a more static understanding of affective relations between species. It would have been welcome to see the conceptual implications of this argument drawn out more forcefully. Nonetheless, this is an engaging text that offers valuable insight into events leading up to the other books discussed here.

Weaver's *Bad Dog*, for instance, offers an analysis of how many of the historical themes raised by Pearson are manifested in contemporary U.S. settings. With its evocative cover of an American Pitbull staring directly at the camera, as well as its punchy title and promising subtitle ('Pit Bull Politics and Multispecies Justice'), I was excited at the prospect of the book. *Bad Dog* promised (and in many ways delivers on this promise) to engage with a rich body of scholarship at the nexus of animal studies, queer theory and critical race studies, in order to elucidate how race, gender, sexuality and disability intersect around the project of dog rescue and adoption. The book is informed by ethnographic insights from a no-kill shelter based in California. As such, Weaver is able to offer felt understanding of processes surrounding dog rescue, which include the experiences and feelings of rescue workers themselves and challenges of 'rehabilitating' dogs whose behaviour might resist accommodation into human domestic spaces. The book's central critique is targeted at the way that would-be rescuers – as well as the charities and animal advocates at the vanguard of the no-kill movement – project hopes and desires onto dogs. These projected narratives, Weaver argues, entrench middle class visions of the family and home, perpetuate racialized stereotypes about who is a 'bad' dog owner (as well as who is a 'bad dog') and reinscribe (white-) saviour narratives.

The problematic dynamics of rescue are illustrated, for example, in the stories narrated by shelter workers of naïve 'ladies in pink flip flops' (p.40) who believe that dogs' behavioural issues will vanish upon entry to the middle-class home (and who swiftly return animals in the wake of bites and aggression). Another common complaint from shelter workers is of white, middle-class homeowners who concoct imagined life stories for animals, as with a couple who maintained that a dog they had found wandering the street was 'part of a domestic violence situation' and had 'deliberately been set loose by the victim of said

violence for its protection, and therefore … couldn't be returned to its original neighborhood' (p. 23). These classed and racialized imaginaries of bad homes, Weaver argues, are perpetuated in campaigns by charities themselves, which construct rescue and adoption as moral imperatives and the new home as a space of rehabilitation. This construction of the safe domestic space, however, does not just apply to *any* home, as shelter policies regarding what sort of dwellings are suitable for adoptees (such as gardens or requirements to meet all family members before adoption) inevitably also carry classed and racialized exclusions. Indeed, Weaver suggests, the no-kill movement can even harm dogs themselves, by failing to reckon with the distress caused by long-term shelter life for dogs who are incompatible with this home.

The arguments provided in *Bad Dog* are critically important, however, I would have been interested to see further reflection on how the book's specific engagement with theory and methods shaped its conclusions. In theoretical terms, the book draws together feminist STS (such as Vinciane Despret, Haraway and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa) and intersectional feminism (particularly Kimberlé Crenshaw and Jennifer Nash). Against this conceptual backdrop Weaver develops concepts such as 'becoming in kind' (p. 101) – which points to the way 'race, gender, class, sexuality, species and breed' co-emerge. These arguments offer welcome interventions in animal studies contexts where discussion of social inequalities have often melted away, in favour of more celebratory narratives of co-becoming. Yet neglect of inequality and identity has not been uniform across the field. Rather than presenting this argument as entirely novel, therefore, *Bad Dog* could have been enriched with more detailed discussion of affinities between concepts coined by Weaver and scholarship the book touches on more briefly (see, for example, texts mentioned on p. 200, note 27) or allied research about intersectionality and multispecies justice (such as Ahuja, 2016; Jackson, 2015). In methodological terms, at times I worried that stories of 'ladies in pink flip flops' offered by frustrated shelter workers, though saying something important – and deeply problematic – about adoptees, were being tied to theoretical claims a little too neatly. It would have been wonderful to see some of the astute observations about the problems of narrative projection on the part of would-be-adoptees, reflexively linked back to the stories that *Bad Dog* itself tells about these adoptees and their motivations.

For a different understanding of rescue, it might be informative to read *Bad Dog* in tandem with Abrell's *Saving Animals*. Though Abrell's book is focused on a similar theme (rescue) and method (ethnography) – and does not shy away from criticizing the sanctuary movement – the monograph's emphasis is different. While Weaver foregrounds tensions surrounding rescue, Abrell offers a window into the ways that different sanctuaries are already recognizing, confronting and negotiating these tensions. The book is a comparative ethnography that focuses on three sanctuaries, all based in different parts of the U.S., that care for animals 'in three different animal consumption regimes – food, entertainment, and companionship' (p. 12): an ex-farm animal sanctuary, an 'exotic' animal sanctuary and a no-kill domestic animal shelter. These materials are complemented by fieldwork in other sanctuaries, a conference for those running sanctuaries to share advice and analysis of promotional materials. What results is a multi-faceted, nuanced and complex analysis of the sanctuary movement, which foregrounds its heterogeneity and the complex ways that care and killing are negotiated.

The book's central argument is that, although, from a critical perspective, aspects of sanctuaries could be read as problems or contradictions, they are necessary compromises in a world that renders violence-free, non-instrumentalized relations with nonhuman animals impossible. For instance, the farm sanctuary Abrell worked in was often forced to prioritize the safety of individual animals over their freedom to socialize with one another, as illustrated by a calf, Flower, whose historic injuries left her with limited mobility. Although it was too resource-intensive to risk Flower living with other cows – because this would require constant monitoring and risk further injury – such decisions were subject to constant reflection and negotiation, wherein workers attempted to create opportunities for Flower to socialize amidst these constraints. Similar tensions arose in relation to animal labour, wherein the need to generate revenue for sanctuaries sometimes constrained animals' autonomy by requiring interaction with visitors who provided revenue.

What is so valuable about Abrell's comparative approach, is that he is able to tease out how these decisions are made in radically different ways in different contexts. At the Rainbow Haven 'exotic' animal

sanctuary in Hawaii, for instance, the physical needs and requirements of animals meant they were often more actively enabled to express their agency. For example, parrots and zebras behaved in ways that meant caregivers had to radically change their practices of feeding and cleaning (pp. 62-76). The challenges sanctuaries are forced to confront, however, are expressed most forcefully in Abrell's third chapter, 'Animal Death', which focuses on how death is entangled with animal care. These arguments build upon Thom van Dooren's conception of 'violent-care' in *Flight Ways* (2014) and are one of the most valuable interventions made by *Saving Animals*.

'Animal Death' outlines how care is expressed through killing in a range of different ways. The farm sanctuary site is shaped by a vegan ethic of minimizing death and caring for all the sanctuary's residents no matter the expense, but still sometimes skirts the ethical dilemmas created by mice by allowing barn cats free reign. In contrast with Weaver's critique of no-kill shelters for keeping dogs who cannot be re-homed, the shelters Abrell engages with make difficult decisions to euthanize these dogs due to perceptions they would have a poor quality of life. Rainbow Haven offers still further complexity, due to the proximity of other predatory wild animals who require policing, and because so many of its residents (such as birds of prey) are carnivorous. In particular, dilemmas over feeding created 'two categories of animals: the sacrificed and the saved. As targets of the sanctuary's life fostering biopolitical practices, the birds, as saved animals, are imbued with a kind of care value that cements them as "most-concern". The mice and chicks, on the other hand, are too useful to the project of saving these animals to be saved themselves' (p. 158). What is so welcome about Abrell's analysis is that he resists framing killing as 'an impossible-to-reconcile contradiction'. Instead, he suggests, 'it reveals precisely how sanctuaries manage to accomplish rescuing and caring for thousands of animals: by balancing the larger goal of creating a better world for animals with responding pragmatically to the daily dilemmas of captive animal care within the political, economic, and social limitations of sanctuary life' (p. 173).

As a whole I found *Saving Animals* an excellent piece of scholarship, each chapter adding a new layer to its exploration of how sanctuaries negotiated contradictions, with 'Animal Death' serving as the

fulcrum of these arguments. My only query was whether some of the new concepts coined in the book were always necessary. Although the central concept of *bestia sacer* was a well-informed re-working of Agamben to account for the specific ways nonhuman animals are stripped of political life (bios) in non-sanctuary settings, the text was so rich that I wasn't always sure whether this or other terms coined were always needed. The concept of 'necro-care' (p. 151), for instance, could be seen as a specific form of violent-care rather than something entirely new – especially when many of the practices Abrell describes overlap with van Dooren. However, this is a small quibble and, in general, *Saving Animals* should be essential reading for anyone working in animal studies today, especially those interested in the challenge of creating space for multispecies futures in the constraints of the present.

Consumption

Paralleling discussions of domestication, scholarship focused on the consumption of nonhuman animals has been characterized by fraught debate. The three texts I discuss in this section – Oliver's *Veganism, Archives, and Animals*, Chatterjee and Subramaniam's edited collection *Meat!*, and Quinn's *Reading Veganism* – speak clearly to this impetus for critique that is situated and complex, while still offering ethical pathways to more hopeful ways of living alongside nonhuman animals.

Veganism, Archives, and Animals, for instance, resists being categorized within a specific branch of animal studies (and the potential limitations created by such categorizations). While explicitly committed to vegan ethics – and understanding this ethics as vital in securing more just multispecies futures – Oliver's monograph complicates how such an ethics should be understood and enacted. The book is informed by different strands of animal studies in general and animal geographies in particular, but offers a different emphasis to other recent work in vegan geographies (Hodge et al, 2022) by drawing more explicitly from traditions in feminist science studies (especially Puig de la Bellacasa) as well as ecofeminism (notably Carol J. Adams). The book also works with and against dominant paradigms in

more-than-human geographies, which have drawn hope from embodied and affective entanglements between humans and nonhuman animals, by interrogating the ethical implications of these entanglements from a vegan perspective.

Oliver's critical approach is perhaps best illustrated by her focus on method. Divided into three sections ('pasts', 'presents' and 'futures'), the book's ethics is enacted through reflections about the challenges of translating methodologies that are often applied to human experience and histories – archival research, interviews and ethnography – to research nonhuman animals. The final chapter's reflections on multispecies ethnography begin with one of the central challenges of this approach, as expressed by Kathryn Gillespie, that researchers often face 'a "troubling expectation to bear witness to violence against animals and do nothing"' (Gillespie, in Oliver, 2021: p. 98). Oliver's ethnography of living with rescue chickens pushes back against the expectation of 'doing nothing', by keeping the violence that has shaped (and continues to shape) the lives of chickens Lacey, Bluebell, Olive, Cleo, Winnie and Primrose in view (p. 95).

Weaving her embodied experiences together with statistics associated with chicken farming, Oliver argues that a vegan ethic of contesting animal product consumption is ethnographically valuable. This ethic, she suggests, insists on highlighting the wider contexts that frame ethnographic encounters with nonhuman animals, in this instance violence towards chickens that is normalized both by the agricultural infrastructures that shape egg production and everyday practices of consumption. At the same time, Oliver foregrounds the risk of vegan ethics subjugating lived animal experience to an overarching moral agenda, describing how her 'initial approaches to these chickens instrumentalized them in the work I wanted to do, the things I wanted to say, and the futures I wanted to imagine' (p. 101). Here, multispecies ethnography spoke back against Oliver's own ethical assumptions, creating space for affective attunement with chickens that helped to unpick her (well-intended) instrumentalization.

Dialogues between different bodies of thought are not limited to Oliver's discussion of multispecies futures, but shape discussion of the other methods drawn upon throughout the book. Chapters 1-3, for instance, engage with Oliver's experience of archiving the papers of Richard Ryder, the scholar and activist who coined the influential term 'speciesism'. Central to these chapters are two challenges: firstly, the challenge of centring animals themselves in archives that are, by design, documenting human lives. And, secondly, the challenge of foregrounding the voices of women such as Roslind Godlovitch and Brigid Brophy whose activism – and friendship – informed Ryder's work (as well as that of peers in the Oxford Group of animal ethicists, such as Peter Singer) but who were ultimately excluded from the 'rationalist' approaches to animal liberation that were pioneered by the Oxford Group. To negotiate these issues, Oliver traverses activist histories, insights from feminist science studies, analytic philosophy and ecofeminism (which, as described above, has traced similar gendered exclusions within animal studies more widely), to explore how silences in activist archives can be addressed. This combination of theoretical perspectives to ask questions about method, speaks to the book's overarching emphasis of realizing a vegan geography that combines attention to nonhuman agency (that is often more associated with relational, more-than-human thought inspired by Haraway and related thinkers) with critical frameworks offered by CAS and ecofeminism.

Overall, therefore, *Veganism, Archives, and Animals* offers a deeply situated and personal reflection about how to negotiate conceptual and methodological challenges and carve out different ethical trajectories in animal studies. I have to admit, though, at times I found myself longing for the rich materials in the first two sections of the book to be given a little more room to speak, in the same manner as the chickens were given space to express their agency in Oliver's reflections on multispecies futures. Oliver writes beautifully, and lyrically, but in places I wondered if the – important – theoretical and methodological issues that were centralized in the book could have been enriched by more discussion of the materials that had generated these insights. That said, my personal preferences themselves risk

imposing rigid social scientific expectations onto this text, in a manner that undermines what makes the book so intriguing, provocative and valuable.

Quinn's *Reading Veganism: The Monstrous Vegan, 1818 to Present* offers an equally provocative re-reading of veganism that is a useful complement to Oliver, due to examining anxieties attached to vegan bodies that speak to some of the activist histories occurring across this period. As the term 'reading' suggests, however, Quinn's focus is on literary depictions of veganism (or proto-veganism) and, as evoked by 'monstrous', these depictions position veganism as something transgressive. Each of the book's chapters focuses on a different author (Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells, Margaret Atwood, J. M. Coetzee, and Alan Hollinghurst, respectively) and interrogates the four dimensions that characterize the 'monstrous vegan' across these texts. As Quinn sets out in the first chapter, elucidated through the figure of Frankenstein's monster, reading texts through a vegan lens reveals 'a complex amalgamation of anxieties and contradictions' that consist of four recurring traits: 'First, monstrous vegans do not eat animals. Second, they are hybrid assemblages of both human and animal parts. Third, they are sired outside of heterosexual reproduction. And, fourth, monstrous vegans possess an intimate relation to acts of writing, as overt metaphors for the process of literary creation' (p. 40). Each chapter of the book engages with these four dimensions of vegan monstrosity, in order to argue that literary renderings of veganism are not straight-forward depictions of consumption choices but work to queer normative understandings of 'the human'.

One of the elements that stands out about Quinn's book is the depth of conceptual understanding that informs the analysis. Despite promising to reinterpret canonical literature from a vegan perspective, what this perspective consists of is more complex than simply taking (for example) a contemporary definition of veganism as abstention from animal products and forcing existing texts to fit into this mould. Quinn instead develops a conception of veganism as a practice that resists ethical closure, drawing on queer theory to support this argument. The book's queer reframing of veganism takes place in two stages; firstly, the term 'vegan' is likened to Judith Butler's argument that concepts such as 'woman' and

'gender' operate as 'permanent sites of contest [that refuse] closure into an all-inclusive or substantive definition' (p. 4). As Quinn argues, this lack of closure is illustrated by the way that even the most institutionalized definitions of veganism – such as the UK Vegan Society's – emphasize the elimination of animal products 'as far as is possible and practicable' (p. 6), and thus define vegan practice against its own impossibility. The second set of tools that Quinn draws from queer theory are offered by Lee Edelman's critique of social reproduction and José Esteban Muñoz's utopianism, drawing together these theorists to ask what horizons can be opened up once exclusionary futures (predicated on the heteronormative nuclear family) are displaced. Understood through this lens, for Quinn veganism is something that expands conversations about queer futurity and worldmaking beyond 'the human' to trouble not only social but anthropocentric reproduction.

The book is valuable, in part, through taking literature that has been discussed in other animal studies contexts (such as Haraway's reading of Coetzee) and subjecting these texts to interrogation from a vegan perspective. However, for me, Quinn's most significant intervention was the final chapter's analysis of Hollinghurst. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's distinction between paranoid and reparative readings, Quinn argues that – while a paranoid reading of Hollinghurst might centre on the way that vegetarianism is 'utilized in his work as a thinly veiled metaphor for sexual anxieties and failures' (p. 144) – a reparative reading is possible. This reading is furthered through what Quinn coins 'vegan camp': a useful concept defined as 'an aesthetic lens and sensibility that, while acknowledging the extremity of animal suffering, seeks to draw sustenance from what has previously only caused pain' (p. 145).

Reading Hollinghurst through the framework of vegan camp, Quinn suggests the excessiveness of Hollinghurst's sad vegetarians can be 'read as a satire of the desperation to assert such links between masculinity and meat, revealing the instability of human desires more broadly' (p. 147). This argument is illustrated through texts such as Hollinghurt's 1988 novel *The Swimming-Pool Library*, which features a central character – James – who spends his time consuming 'tofuburgers' while failing to satisfy his sexual fantasies (pp. 154-4). Though the most obvious reading of James is the trope of the deprived vegan

longing for meat, for Quinn: 'Applying a vegan camp lens to the text allows for a pleasurable embrace of James as sexless vegan monster [… that] provides the vegan reader a humorous indulgence in veganism's own failures in the face of a pervasive anthropocentrism' (p. 159). Framed in relation to the definitions of veganism put forward in the book's introduction, veganism is necessarily an impure project of struggling to articulate ethics in a social context where this is impossible. Rather than despairing amidst this failure, by parodying – and even reveling in – it, vegan camp subverts normative expectations that surround meat consumption. As such, Quinn's concept offers an imaginative, and exciting, tool for literary animal studies moving forward.

While *Reading Veganism's* application of theory is impeccable and highly generative, I would have welcomed further discussion of the reasons – and limitations – of choosing these specific texts to anchor the analysis. The power of tracing affinities in terms of how veganism is represented across contexts is very valuable, but at times Quinn's examination of how these four tropes of monstrosity exist across very different national settings runs the risk of giving veganism's meanings a sense of unexpected stability. In other words, even as veganism is framed as resisting closure and troubling anthropocentric futures, its framing *as* transgressive is posited as relatively stable.

Chatterjee and Subramaniam's edited collection *Meat!* could, perhaps, be paired productively with Quinn, to reflect on the way that meanings surrounding human-animal relations shift (and sometimes stick) across different national contexts. The book consists of 12 chapters, which gather together some of the most influential and innovative thinkers in cultural theory, including Neel Ahuja, Mel Y. Chen and Elspeth Probyn, alongside individual chapters by Chatterjee and Subramaniam themselves. The introduction simultaneously maps and unsettles existing conceptions of 'meat' across animal studies and beyond, and should be essential reading for anyone working at the field's intersection with queer theory, critical race studies and disability studies. As outlined by Chatterjee and Subramaniam, the book traces the, often unexpected and always situated, processes wherein particular bodies – both human and nonhuman – are rendered 'meat' within specific social and cultural contexts. In other words, the

collection offers an expanded conception of what 'meat' constitutes; though meat can signify 'consumable flesh' it can also work as 'a currency for empire; it is mother, oftentimes exotic, a sexual and racial signifier, a fetish; it can also be fish, vegetable, plant, technology, and a fierce conduit for biopolitics' (p. 2). The book's focus in this regard is on: 'delv[ing] into the politics of becoming meat' and 'what or who becomes meat' (p. 2), with a sharp focus on the ethical stakes of these processes.

These stakes are illustrated by Probyn's chapter, which traces how particular species of fish in southern oceans are being transformed into economically valuable 'meat'. In the wake of interrelated ecological disasters (collapsing fish stocks in northern oceans, oceanic warming leading to easier accessibility of deep-sea denizens) and amidst marketing campaigns promoting the once unknown (and now astonishingly expensive) toothfish to US markets, Probyn offers a stark warning against the large-scale trawling of southern fisheries: 'we have no idea what we are eating, or what we are doing to these unknown fish and their ecosystems' (p. 21). The New Zealand 'gold rush' for a different species, the orange roughy, saw the fish pushed to near extinction in under three years, and: 'When the science finally caught up with the trawlers, it was discovered that the roughy is exceptionally long lived – some have dated as 150 years old. And it doesn't come into sexual maturity until it is in its mid-thirties. This means that stocks taken now would take thirty years to replenish' (p. 23). The perhaps irreversible ecological destruction created by demand for new fish 'meat' is also, inevitably, connected with imperialist struggles over who has 'rights' to plunder Antarctic seas and whose way of life are damaged by these struggles.

As a whole, the book makes several welcome interventions. Firstly, the collection offers a complex narrative about the ethical meanings attached to meat, by resisting assumptions about what meat 'is' and instead analyzing its function as a 'conduit for biopolitics' in different cultural contexts (p. 2). For instance, while recognizing the value of Carol J. Adams's conception of 'meat' as an 'absent referent' for 'signaling unthinking consumption, lack of knowledge as to the origin of the flesh, and its sexual politics' (p. 6), the editors foreground a need to understand the wider ecological processes, economic structures and ideologies that are involved when transforming beings into 'meat'. In individual chapters, this

emphasis results in surprising juxtapositions of processes through which human and nonhuman bodies are regulated: such as Chatterjee's analysis of the nationalist desires that connect the promotion of both yoga and beef bans by the Indian state, or Kim Q. Hall's queer-crip reading of the 'messy, violent, debilitating intimacies that are denied in romantic tales of barbecue and xeno science' (p. 151).

The book's second distinctive contribution relates to another way that it moves beyond narrow, culturally-specific conceptions of 'meat', by including chapters that engage with a diverse range of conceptual foci and geographical locations. Jennifer Hamilton, for instance, traces the transit of frozen meat across the North American Arctic, in relation to imperial institutions (such as the Explorers Club), settler-colonial 'civilizing' processes, and racist marketing rhetoric; Anita Mannur applies the concept of slow violence to consumption in areas affected by Chernobyl; Psyche Williams-Forson examines the relationship between meat and Black masculinity in *Breaking Bad*; while Angela Willey explores the queer potential of fake meat (to name just a few contributions). As the editors note, though, perhaps the book's most substantive focus is on South Asia, which enables the book 'to showcase how deeply implicated meat is with colonial, anticolonial, regional, religious, and cultural politics of the subcontinent' (p. 5).

The complexity of 'meat' consumption in this region is encapsulated by Ahuja's chapter 'On Phooka', which traces the historical interplay between Hindu nationalism, British imperialism, economic drivers to produce dairy for international markets and welfarism imported by white elites in colonial Bengal. These processes, Ahuja argues, enabled a situation where beef became 'the target of an indigenizing nationalist discourse that […] situated the alimentary traditions of the colonized within a nostalgic, historically dubious paradigm of Vedic vegetarianism' at the time as the nation saw a 'proto-industrial expansion of the exploitation of bovines for milk' (p. 215). While there have been a number of valuable critiques of cow protectionism within animal studies (see, for example, Narayanan, 2018), through expanding the focus to histories of milk veneration Ahuja is able to trace how contradictions between nationalism, economics and animal welfare were negotiated in ways that intensified religious and

caste violence. As Ahuja traces, the intensification of interest in regulating dairy production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century focused on a specific practice (phooka) that was rhetorically associated with poor Bengali farmers. Through encouraging the elimination of this specific practice, Hindu nationalists were able to align themselves with the 'civilizing' discourses of animal welfare imposed by the colonial administration while still maintaining the veneration of cows and rendering the (increasingly lucrative) production of dairy compatible with cow protectionism. This process, however, simultaneously constructed poor, predominantly Muslim, farmers as being to blame for cruelty in ways that continue to have ramifications in the contemporary moment.

As a whole, therefore, *Meat!* complements and complicates arguments about the signification of 'meat' and the meanings attached to veganism offered by the other two texts in this section. At the same time, the book illustrates how critique of existing ways of relating to nonhuman animals – and the ecological disasters that often accompany these shifts – can be explored in complex, culturally-situated ways. As Parama Roy concludes in a chapter entitled 'On Being Meat', overturning anthropocentric hierarchies is not a straight-forward task and 'what constitutes a departure from anthropocentrism needs always to be subject to skeptical investigation'. In the wake of this recognition, what is needed, Roy suggests, 'is to develop a certain modesty about presuming too quickly that we know what the meanings are of meat, anthropocentric privilege, or the sacrifice of animal sacrifice' (p. 184). More critical scholars might desire a firmer ethical stance than the collection offers, and it is true that the level of theoretical complexity does not always make for an easy read in some of the chapters (where re-reading is sometimes necessary to follow the thread of the argument). Nonetheless, overall, what *Meat!* elucidates is that epistemic modesty does not preclude critique of the violence and inequalities that arise when diverse beings are rendered meat.

Extinction

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In recent years, influential work in the environmental humanities has argued for an 'ethics of storytelling' in response to the overwhelming loss of nonhuman animal life that is occurring as the world enters an era of mass extinction (see, for example, van Dooren, 2014: p. 9). Though sometimes broader in ecological scope, environmental humanities research often overlaps with animal studies due to its focus on particular species – or even individual animals – to anchor wider extinction stories. Celermajer's *Summertime* and Mather's *Crooked Cats* are books that sit at this intersection, taking animals seriously as individuals while situating their lives within more expansive environmental narratives. Something else shared by these texts is that each uses stories to open space for intervening in ecological crisis, while refusing to discard complexity in the telling of these stories.

Mathur's *Crooked Cats* engages with dilemmas that arise when endangered species pose a threat to the people who live near them. Grounded in ethnographic research within the Indian Himalaya region, Mathur describes how residents do not distinguish big cats on the basis of species (using the same terminology for tigers and leopards, for instance) but behaviour; dividing '*seedha bagh* (straightforward/simple big cat) from *tedha bagh* (twisted/crooked big cat); *adamkhor* (man-eater) from *bekasoor* (innocent)' (p. 29). Each chapter presents a series of 'beastly tales' about human-cat relations that elucidate different ways cats become *adamkhor* and how these 'crooked cats' are negotiated in social, political and material terms. The book is upfront about offering no neat theoretical conclusions. Indeed, the labels 'innocent' and 'crooked' are themselves complex phenomena; responsibility for attacks is shaped by legislative demands for particular forms of evidence, which is often pieced together through material traces (pugmarks, territory mapping, camera-traps) and cultural norms linked to the affective experiences of locals who encounter big cats. The challenge of designating cats as crooked, however, pales in comparison to the problems that surround commonplace options for managing crooked cats (which range from hunting to capture and relocation). Despite resisting easy answers, through the multi-faceted narrative of human-cat relations that is developed throughout *Crooked Cats*, Mathur makes three important interventions.

Firstly, Mathur centralizes the narratives of those who live closest to big cats; an approach that is both ethically important and overturns simplistic narratives of scientists and conservationists' interests being at odds with local residents. Through a sensitive focus on local knowledge, Mathur is able to demonstrate moments of alignment with conservationism – as with the outcry that often arises locally when *bekasoor* cats are mistakenly trapped or killed instead of those deemed the real man-eaters. Tensions are also traced, but Mathur does not attribute these tensions to simplistic fault-lines between conservationists and locals (as sometimes crudely portrayed in narratives of environmental crisis). Instead, these tensions are situated as responses to the exploitation of the Himalaya's resources (by wealthier, urban regions of India) and histories of colonialism (as with allegations that officials and NGOs care more about cats than people when failing to kill *tedha bagh*).

Secondly, Mathur's narratives centralize the Anthropocene. The expansion of cities, climate change and extractive legacies of colonialism often force big cats and humans into close proximity in ways that increase the chances of the animals becoming 'crooked'. Indeed, Mathur argues that a backdrop of climate crisis helps to make sense of local responses to big cats that are often read as contradictory: such as the desire to remove those labelled man-eaters from communities, while feeling deep-rooted sympathy for these cats. As Mathur argues: 'contradicting narratives on crooked cats can coexist because the people who live in close proximity to them are conscious that the crookedness is not the doing of the individual feline but rather emerges from longer-term structures and human actions' (p. 11). Yet, as traced in chapter 6, 'Big Cats in the City', which contrasts human-leopard relations in different urban settings, not all proximal encounters are dangerous. In Gopeshwar, colonial histories (inspired by the figure of famous hunter-turned conservationist Jim Corbett) have created a 'culture of hunting' that, Mathur argues, increases chances of cats being labelled 'crooked' (p. 112). In Shimla, the expansion of middle and upper-class suburbs into formerly forested areas has resulted in similar demands to remove cats, in the wake of 'clips of leopards walking around … well-manicured gardens' (p. 123). Mumbai, in contrast, offers a site of hope due to long histories of humans and leopards living alongside one another in 'an

equanimous coexistence' (123). Against a backdrop of climate change, therefore, Mathur finds in Mumbai:

> the possibility and hope of living-beside between humans and predators in almost unimaginable terms. It shows that we can learn to live with predators in our back yards … As the climate breakdown becomes more evident in a variety of ways – from droughts to famines to floods to big cats in the city – in India, it becomes increasingly important to be conscious of the difference that collective human actions can make. (p. 123)

Relatedly, Mathur's third contribution stresses the importance of storytelling in opening space for intervention. *Crooked Cats*' stories are told through blending ethnographic insights with description of legislation and grassroots petitions; local stories and canonical fiction about big cats; and analysis of celebrity animals (such as Vijay the tiger). What is striking about the book is that this combination of methods never comes across as cherry-picking, because Mathur is careful to offer socio-political context for the different knowledges that are being brought together by dedicating specific chapters to – for instance – the complexity of petition writing in relation to state-specific legislation (chapter 4), the workings of camera-traps (chapter 7) or the different ways local people interpret cat behaviour (chapter 3). By the time these ideas are brought together in the conclusion – where Mathur offers three 'beastly tales' of big cats that combine the discussions in previous chapters – it is possible to understand the complex relationships between these knowledges, acknowledging how they are shaped by specific cultural contexts without denigrating particular ways of understanding the world.

The only critical reflection I had about the book was less about its own content, and more what it evokes about the direction of animal studies as a field. As someone working across media and animal studies I found chapter 7's discussion of camera-traps especially valuable in drawing attention to the role of mediation in shaping apprehensions of 'crookedness'. At the same time, I noticed that scholarship marshalled in this chapter was primarily geographical. While this choice of literature is not a major issue

with *Crooked Cats*, it perhaps does speak to a wider lack of dialogue between media and animal studies that is due, in most part, to a relative lack of interest in nonhuman animals in media studies contexts (for notable exceptions see Parikka, 2010; Parkinson, 2019). In many ways, therefore, the book made me excited at the potential for more substantive conversations to unfold if longstanding scholarship on media ecologies is brought into conversation with anthropological, geographical and environmental humanities scholarship on more-than-human environments.

In a different way, the importance of mediation is underlined by Celermajer's *Summertime*. The book emerged in the wake of an article written by Celermajer, which described the deep grief experienced by a resident at their smallholding, Jimmy, after the loss of his companion Katy during bushfires that swept through Australia at the turn of 2020:

> We call him, but it is only when we get right up close that he answers, and only in the softest voice – a voice very different from his usual booming baritone. I just climbed down to where he was lying and finally got him to drink a little water, but he showed no interest in food – not even watermelon, his favourite treat. I had no idea that grief could be so deep for anyone. (p. 1)

As Celermajer states in the original article, and repeats in *Summertime*: 'I have held off telling you that Jimmy is a pig because I appreciate that for many human beings knowing his species would make it impossible to read this as a story about the enormity of loss. But stay with me' (p. 1). What becomes apparent during the book is that many readers of the original article *did* stay with Celermajer: sharing their own losses and offering sympathy or even material support for Jimmy, in expressions of collective mourning that crossed species lines p. (170). Reading Jimmy's story in full, which is reproduced and elaborated upon in the opening chapter of *Summertime*, 'Grief', I can understand why it received such a strong public response.

Jimmy and Katy were the first denizens of Celermajer's new rural home, living there for three years after spending the start of their life with their original rescuer, who had saved them from a factory farm at three weeks old when they were 'discarded as "wastage"' (p. 2). Although both pigs remained nervous of the world around them (despite being 200kg, Jimmy, for instance, fled whenever chickens were nearby), they took solace in one another and gained confidence in the humans who cared for them. In late 2019, however, news reports and app notifications suggested that the fires were coming dangerously close to Celermajer's home, so Jimmy and Katy were temporarily relocated to their original rescuer. However, bushfires can spread unpredictably and, shortly afterwards, Celermajer received the news that, while her home had remained safe, the rescuer's farm – and nearly her life – was lost in the fire. Katy too was gone. Yet Jimmy miraculously survived, and Celermajer and her partner were eventually able to track him down. The next day, however, Jimmy began to search for Katy: 'In their house, down in their woods, up under the trees where they had once taken shade from the afternoon sun. He would turn and look and stand very still – listening for her…' (p. 4). After failing to find her, Jimmy just lay down, refusing food and solace.

Though Celermajer opens with Jimmy's story, his experiences offer an entry point for Celermajer – and readers – to find their own ways of comprehending overwhelming loss and asking difficult questions about responsibility. As Celermajer closes this chapter:

> When people speak about the fires they often speak about being overwhelmed by the enormity of the devastation. We do not really have the capacity to grasp this much loss – not only to humans, but to other wild and domesticated animals, to the bush, to the ecologies of rivers and moss and the creatures who flourish there, to the possibility of regeneration. I know I don't. But I can hold Jimmy's enormous grieving head in my arms and be present to the gravity and finality of this loss. And, at the same time, to his broken but miraculous presence. (pp. 5-6)

The rest of *Summertime* offers the wider contexts for both Jimmy's grief and public response to it, following the opening chapter with sections entitled 'Before', 'During', 'After' and 'World'. Published as an accessible trade book for Penguin Australia, the book devastated me on several levels. Not only does the book open with a scene of material devastation, but – through centring Jimmy and Katy's lives, the days that led to Katy's death and the aftermath of these events for Jimmy – Celermajer also manages to convey the scale of loss in a way that felt emotionally devastating, but also offered routes into comprehending and processing loss from the lens of multispecies justice.

Events in the book are framed in relation to many of the themes that have been central to animal studies and the environmental humanities, including the colonial contexts that often frame human-animal relations, questions about responsibility and care ethics. Stories interspersed through the texts about the other animals inhabiting the farm (such as donkeys comforting one another) speak to wider discussions of interspecies solidarity, while reflections about the sensory knowledges animals use to negotiate fires (and which, unfortunately, were not enough to save the thousands of koalas who perished in 2020) echo wider discussions of embodiment and animal agency. Some parts of the text also have echoes of more critical strands of animal studies, as with Celermajer's reflections on searching for dog treats for some of her other companions and being promoted dried pigs' ears (p. 84). Perhaps most significantly, the text centres questions about the 'ethics of storytelling'. Framed as a means of fostering ethical responsibility and new forms of care, I have sometimes been concerned about whether stories really do move people in the way that is claimed. *Summertime* changed my perspective, perhaps because – as Celermajer asserts – 'this is not a story' (p. 69), it is a book that, through centring individual animal lives, finds pathways to articulating collective responsibility. In Celermajer's closing words:

> Can we learn to tell new, far-reaching stories about responsibility? Do we have the capacity to put our names to stories that both recognise the unevenness of culpability and its concentration in particular types of practices and arrangements – and, yes, also in

> particular people and groups of people – and at the same time, to acknowledge the ways in which we are all implicated? (p. 185)

Despite the devastating extinction story that *Summertime* itself tells, Celermajer's way of telling it gives me hope that this task is possible.

Conclusions

In a slightly (well, very) self-indulgent way, I'd planned to begin this essay by reflecting on some of the rich animal studies scholarship from the past 12 months that I would have loved to have engaged with in my own 2021 monograph on veganism (if publication timelines had been different). I would have outlined, for instance, how some of these texts had made me rethink the theoretical frameworks I used (Chatterjee and Subramaniam; Quinn) and histories and methods I engaged with (Oliver; Pearson), or prompted me to reflect more deeply on the situatedness of animal advocacy (Abrell; Weaver) as well as the urgency and complexity of responding to ecological catastrophe (Celermejar; Mathur). However, as I read through these texts, it became impossible to reduce things to instrumental discussions. Instead, I was compelled to reflect on the very different entry points to ethics that each book offered, not just in terms of what sort of ethical position was espoused but how this ethics was articulated. Indeed, if anything characterizes recent animal studies literature, it is a heterogeneity with regards to the theoretical frameworks and methodologies used to explore and express animal ethics.

Echoing the arguments of some of the books discussed in this essay, therefore, in this review essay there are few neat narratives that can be told about this year's work in animal studies (other than, perhaps, noting the different ways they have approached shared themes). However, as I have noted throughout the essay, authors' contrasting approaches often reveal different facets of the same phenomenon, which means reading across texts is often especially

productive. What unites many of these books, moreover, is that they elucidate routes beyond persistent tensions in the field, which have pitched 'critique' against culturally-situated and complex narratives of human-animal relations. In moving beyond false dichotomies, much of the scholarship discussed here demonstrates that – when it comes to writing about relationships between humans and nonhuman animals – it is not a matter of choosing between critique and nuance. Critique can, itself, be nuanced.

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